

# Travis County Audubon Blair Woods Sanctuary

Travis County Historical Commission. Working paper updated 05-25-2020

Compiled by Richard Denney, TCHC, and Lanny Ottosen, consultant

## Context

12/11/17 members of the Travis County Historical Commission made a field trip to the Travis Co. Audubon Blair Woods Sanctuary (Audubon property for short), 5401 E Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Austin, TX 78721, at the request of Paul Fushille, Travis County Natural Resources Specialist. The property is also home to Austin Wildlife Rescue which rents the main house from the Audubon society. The goal was to look at several old buildings on the property, determine if they were of historic significance, and hence worth restoring, or at least saving. In general, to determine the history of the property. At the outset the site had the promise of historical significance: its proximity to old Fort Colorado AKA Coleman's Fort just across today's MLK Blvd.; the location of Coleman Springs on the property, said to have been a water supply for the fort; the property being part of Fort Prairie, the community that grew up around the fort; and stories of residents of Fort Prairie, indeed Jessie Tannehill, having used materials from the fort to construct buildings.

Following the site visit, TCHC consultant Lanny Ottosen and myself (Richard Denney) did research based on old maps, deeds, newspaper articles. I purchased an aerial photo from Historic Aerials taken in 1952 and a Tobin 1937 aerial photo to aid the investigation. The TCHC has made numerous additional field trips to the property.

In short, the Audubon property preserves layers of history from prehistoric, possibly Spanish (Camino Real), Republic of Texas, Civil War, Reconstruction (a freedmen's colony on the southern boundary) right up to modern times. It is a last remnant of the early community of Fort Prairie that sprang up near Republic of Texas era Fort Colorado. The outbuildings are most certainly (if not earlier) tied to the Moehr family that immigrated from Switzerland in 1908, and bought the acreage in 1911. The connection to the Moehr family also provides a primary source, Susanna Moehr, interviewed by historian Mary Starr Barkley, stating materials from Fort Colorado *were* used on structures at the farm. A prominent Austin family, the Thielepape (Koch) family lived on the property in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century so it's possible some structures and or artifacts are from that period or earlier. In the process of researching Fort Prairie a freedmen's community was discovered just south of the Audubon property that has heretofore not been recognized.

# Overview: Property Timeline; Deed Trail

## El Camino Real, Spanish and Mexican Texas

1690 - 1845 – There is a possibility that Coleman Springs, and later Fort Colorado, may have had some tie to the branch of El Camino Real that passed through Austin. Steven Gonzales, Executive Director for the El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association<sup>1</sup>, made an initial visit to the property 03/09/19. Notes from that meeting have been written and circulated, talks are on-going, so just a quick highlight here.

NPS trail maps show El Camino just to the west of the Audubon property. In addition to proximity, the “Report of the Commissioners to Mirabeau B. Lamar on the suitability of Waterloo as the seat of Government”<sup>2</sup> makes it clear Waterloo’s location as the future capital of Texas (the location of which Ft. Colorado was built to protect access to) was no accident and intended to disrupt "Indian" and "outlawed Mexican" traffic on the Camino Real. That seems a pretty clear indication of a tie between Ft Colorado and Coleman Springs, and the Camino Real segment passing through Austin.

As discussed below, Webberville Rd / FM 969 was an important trail as well, running to Bastrop where it connects with El Camino Real. The spring and later the fort’s location near the intersection of El Camino Real and this alternate trail to Nacogdoches via Bastrop is probably no accident.

## Republic of Texas

1832 – Jessie Tannehill first acquires property as part of his headright league #29. Jessie Tannehill loaned the property to the Republic of Texas for the express purpose of building Fort Colorado; he later started the original town of Montopolis on his headright league. A historical marker for Tannehill and Montopolis are scheduled for 2020 to be located in Govalle Park.

1836 to 1838 Fort Colorado, AKA Fort Coleman, AKA Coleman's Fort, is situated across today's MLK from the Audubon property. Coleman Springs, on the property, is said to have been a source of water for the fort. According to the 1968 archeology report on Fort Colorado<sup>3</sup>, "older residents of Fort Prairie had insisted that the town began shortly after the fort was established". This makes perfect sense as the purpose of forts was to offer protection from hostile Indians and encourage settlement. We have plenty of examples in Texas of towns that sprang up around forts. And in Fort Prairie’s case we have the tradition that the fort, when

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.elcaminorealdelostejas.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Frank Brown's *Annals of Travis County and of the City of Austin (From the Earliest Times to the Close of 1875)*: Volume 15. Starts on page 9; reference to Camino Real page 13. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark%3A/67531/metaph841186/m1/18/>

<sup>3</sup> William Field, "Fort Colorado: A Texas Ranger Frontier Outpost in Travis County, Texas", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No.2, 1968

decommissioned, provided materials that were used by settlers to construct other buildings, Jesse Tannehill's house being a notable example. If so, Fort Prairie the community, is one of the earliest, and longest continually inhabited communities now within Austin's city limits. First references to Fort Prairie appear in news articles as early as 1871.<sup>4</sup>

The location of the fort was no accident; it was located on what Mary Starr Barkley<sup>5</sup> has called the "Path of the Pioneers" the original entry to what would become Austin (today's FM 969 / Webberville Rd) traveled by the likes of settlers from Austin's "Little Colony" and Mirabeau Lamar. In 1966 The Travis County Historical Survey committee suggested FM 969 be designated a "national historical trail", the fort and trail being important in the history of the development of Austin, FM 969 being variously referred to as an old "Comanche Trail", "Old Indian Trail", "Path of the Pioneers" and "Old Stagecoach Road".<sup>6</sup> While historic designation never went through, El Camino Real de los Tejas, a branch of which crosses the Colorado near today's Montopolis Bridge, was indeed designated a National Historic Trail in 2004. Maps produced by the trail association show El Camino Real running just west of Fort Colorado. Fort Colorado sat roughly at the intersection of these two trails.<sup>7</sup>

Noah Smithwick served as a Texas Ranger at the fort and left a description of life and activities of a frontier fort in his seminal *The Evolution of a State: Recollections of Old Texas Days*. Beyond several battles with the Comanche, in the summer of 1837 a small band of Comanche visited the fort seeking a peace treaty. Both Smithwick and the Comanches (and other Native Americans in prehistoric times) would have surely visited Coleman Springs on the Audubon property.

1839 "Camp Walnut Creek (or 'Camp on Walnut Creek') was the main camp of the First Infantry Regiment during the fall of 1839. The camp, established during October, was probably the first camp of the regular army in the Austin area. It was occupied until sometime after November 16, 1839." Pierce<sup>8</sup> places its probable location at "Fort Prairie, near the [former] site of Fort Colorado". This makes sense given the presence of Coleman Springs and location on the main road into Austin from Bastrop, i.e. Webberville Road.

## Civil War

Circa 1865, Fort Colorado's location (possible structures if any?) were briefly used during the waning years of the Civil War to protect against Union forces invading Austin. In archeology reports some of the

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<sup>4</sup> Weekly Democratic Statesman. (Austin, Tex.), Vol. 1, No. 1, Ed. 1 Tuesday, August 1, 1871, p3  
<http://bit.ly/2RFK3Tk>

<sup>5</sup> History of Travis County and Austin: 1839-1899

<sup>6</sup> Austin American Statesman, Aug. 25, 1966

<sup>7</sup> See documentation section.

<sup>8</sup> Pierce, Gerald S. Texas Under Arms: 1836-1846, p. 175. Encino Press, 1969.

trenches and artifacts have been attributed to this period. It is logical to assume Coleman Springs, on the Audubon property, may have been utilized as part of that effort as well.<sup>9,10</sup>

## Reconstruction

Deed trail from Tannehill to J.P. Richardson not established, though if we have the correct J.P. Richardson identified, he purchased property after the close of the Civil War. This period also marks the establishment of the possible Freedmen's community, part of Fort Prairie. See Documentation section.

1869 Sale of 158 acres by William J. Tannehill (heir of Jessie C. Tannehill) and wife to a Mr. Peter Bell. That property is then subdivided via composition deed among Peter Bell and others, Pleasant Davidson being one (connection to St. Mary's Colony, Bastrop). The 1870 census of Travis County confirms these were deed transfers to black members of the community. See more in Documentation section.

## Late-19<sup>th</sup> Century

1884 J.P. Richardson sells 94 acres of the Tannehill league to Jeanette W. Thielepape<sup>11</sup>. J.W. Thielepape is Jeanette Wilhelmine (Koch) Thielepape. She is the second wife of Georg (AKA George) Justus Thielepape. His first wife was Bertha Koch<sup>12</sup>; Bertha and Jeanette were sisters.

1888 George took a position at the General Land Office ca. 1868 moving the family to Austin for the last time (he had previously worked there in 1861 for some period) where he worked for 20 years. His daughter writes *"In the year 1888, he resigned his position in the land office on account of old age, he bought a farm on the Willbarger (sic) Creek, on the old Bastrop road at Hornsby Bend, five miles east of Austin, where he and my mother lived a number of years."*<sup>13</sup> Except for the reference to "Willbarger (sic) Creek" this is most certainly the property Jeanette W. Thielepape had previously purchased. And if they were living on the 94-acre property, they would almost certainly have lived near Coleman Springs. Per the 1880 census the family lived on Peach Street, near the Capitol while he worked for the GLO. The Audubon property is spot on 5 miles to the old Webberville entrance to the Audubon property; and Webberville Road was also of course the road to Hornsby and Bastrop; the old entrance to Austin; the "Path of the Pioneers". Her reference to "Willbarger (sic) Creek" is

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<sup>9</sup> Field

<sup>10</sup> Gerald S Pierce, Texas under arms: The camps, posts, forts, & military towns of the Republic of Texas, 1836-184. Encino Press, 1969

<sup>11</sup> Travis County Deed Records: Deed Record 62, p. 419, 1884. 94 acres using calls for 3 tracts comprised of 50 acres, 4 acres and 40 acres. Retrieved 1/8/2018 from <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth787633/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/173023068/bertha-koch>

<sup>13</sup> Gertrude (Thielepape) Weinert. "In Memory of My Father, George Justus Thielepape", on file at the Austin History Center, written 1959 (?) when she was 83



probably a confusion with Walnut Creek, just east of the Audubon property, on which Josiah Wilbarger was scalped. Wilbarger Creek proper is 20+ miles as the crow flies from the Capitol, and a bit remote. That the Thielepapes were living on the property is significant in that they would of course have to have had living quarters and out buildings for a “farm”. Not to read too much into her statement, she says they *bought* a farm, not *started* a farm, which may indicate structures were on the property before them. George, born in 1811, would have been 77 at the time so it’s reasonable to conclude they were moving onto an existing “farm” given their ages.

1891 map of Austin and Surrounding Properties shows the Mrs. J.W. Thielepape’s 94-acre tract on which the Audubon property now resides.<sup>14</sup>

1895 J.W. Thielepape dies and is buried in Austin’s Oakwood Cemetery.<sup>15</sup> George J. Thielepape passed three years later, 1898, and is buried by his wife.<sup>16</sup>

## Early-20<sup>th</sup> Century

1902, January, 94 acre “ ” for sale in a Swedish paper; our translator says it was “old Swedish”, but translates as "Thielepape's farm located on the road to Decker, consisting of 94 acres at a price of \$3,000 ... Come see us before you purchase land. We are here to stay."<sup>17</sup>

1902, November, heirs of Mrs. J.W. Thielepape conveyed the property to Mary Schenken, son Albert F. Schenken and his wife Mary Bertha Schenken<sup>18</sup>. Mary Louise (Thielepape) Schenken was the step daughter of Mrs. J.W. Thielepape by her father’s first wife, Bertha Koch.

1908 Albert F. Schenken, son of Mary Louise (Thielepape) Schenken, ran an ad in the newspaper seeking a dairy man so it appears at least as early as 1908 the dairy was in operation. This same year Albert sold the farm to Carl Wendlandt<sup>19</sup>. Wendlandt was a realtor that bought and sold many properties in the Austin area; his interest appears to have only been based on an investment opposed to the dairy operation.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.glo.texas.gov](http://www.glo.texas.gov) Map #421

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/59738248/schanette-wilhelmina-thielepape>

<sup>16</sup> Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/59738174/george-justus-thielepape>

<sup>17</sup> Texas Posten (Swedish newspaper), Austin, Texas, January 1902

<sup>18</sup> Travis County Deed Records: Deed Record 185 Page: 288

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth975793/m1/294/?q=Travis%20County%20Deed%20Records:%20Deed%20Record%20185>

<sup>19</sup> Travis County Deed Records, Book 235 Pg 14

1911 Carl & Sophie Wendlandt to Paul Moehr<sup>20</sup> The Moehr period is probably the most historically significant in terms of the buildings on the property. Over the following decades various news articles document the Moehr family and farm; the Moehr connection proves to be important with respect to old Fort Colorado.<sup>21</sup>

1920 Paul Moehr, United States Federal Census – from Switzerland, speaks German, immigrated 1908. They are dwelling #113 in the census; dwelling #112 is John Grove, Sr. as in postmaster of “John, TX” on some maps, AKA Fort Prairie.<sup>22,23</sup> This also explains proximity of the Grove family to the old fort; the Field’s archeology report involves interviews w/ John Grove, Jr. and his memory of having played around the old fort area and what he saw there.

1921 Paul Moehr, advertises selling gravel from his gravel pit, address: **Rt1, Box 16, Fort Prairie**. A gravel pit on the north side of today’s MLK figures into Field’s 1968 archeology report with a story of timbers from the fort. This may well be Moehr’s gravel pit? Aerial photos show other potential gravel pits<sup>24</sup>

1923 Paul Moehr Jr., asst. manager of Pennybacker Duroc Farm, which focused on hogs, on nearby Webberville Rd. Various other news articles document activities of the family in Austin. Susanna Moehr was plugged into the cultural scene of Austin, for example in 1933 the newspaper reported "Miss Susanna Moehr will represent Austin as a duchess at the second annual Cotton Ball and Style Show at A.& M. College this week", and later in 1967 served as the president of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 856. She was also active in the Austin Civic Theatre, and Choral Club.<sup>25, 26, 27</sup>

1923 Paul Moehr, advertises selling 1 cow. “FRESH JERSEY cow for sale, cheap. Gentle. Paul Moehr, Route 1, Box 16, Austin, Texas.” Notice now it reads, Austin, yet a year later, his wife’s obit still uses Fort Prairie.<sup>28</sup>

1923 Paul Moehr, advertises selling 3 "milch" (sic) cows; German for milk; census said native language is German<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Travis County Deed Records, Book 246 Pg 499

<sup>21</sup> Travis County Deed Records, Book 246, p. 499-500

<sup>22</sup> Paul Moehr, 1920 United States Federal Census - <https://www.ancestry.com/sharing/12319550?h=49f766>. Also in 1910 census as living in same Justice Precinct 3, Travis, Texas. See Paul M\*, 1910 United States Federal Census - <https://www.ancestry.com/sharing/12319705?h=9b97c6>.

<sup>23</sup> See reference to John Grove under “Fort Prairie, TX” in Handbook of Texas, <https://tshaonline.org>.

<sup>24</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, Nov 20, 1921, p.14

<sup>25</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, Sep 30, 1923, p. B12

<sup>26</sup> *The Austin American*, April 2, 1933, p. A2

<sup>27</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, May 31, 1967, p.36

<sup>28</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, Mar 22, 1923, p.11

<sup>29</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, May 13, 1923, p.10

1924 Paul Moehr, wife dies; obit says at home in **Fort Prairie**<sup>30</sup>

1928 Paul Moehr, Hay and cane for sale, "Webberville Rd." Aerial photos from 1937 show the entrance to the farm was from Webberville Rd.; FM 969 – AKA MLK – did not extend as it does today.<sup>31</sup>

1930 Paul Moehr Sr. dies; surviving are 3 sons & 3 daughters including Paul Moehr Jr. and sister Susanna<sup>32</sup>. It will be Susanna that eventually buys the property and sells a portion to Frank Blair.

1930 After Paul Moehr Sr. dies, heirs advertise place is for rent; gives description of property; it's a dairy! "THE PAUL MOEHR PLACE. For rent, our 98 acre farm on Webberville road, 3 miles from city limits. Has running water, concrete milk house, land has good grass and pasturage for a dairy. Good dairy barn with hay from last season in good condition. Prefer to rent to dairyman ... Ready to occupy at once."<sup>33</sup>

1931 Paul Moehr heirs, farm is for sale: "FOR SALE - The Paul Moehr farm 3 mi. east of town. Electric lights, running water and equipped for dairy".<sup>34</sup>

1944 Paul Moehr Jr. and "others" (heirs) sell to sister Susanna Moehr 93 acres, Jesse C. Tannehill league.<sup>35</sup>

## Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century; Frank Blair

1951 Blair acquired 10 acres from Susanna Moehr by deed dated 4/26/1951, Travis County Deed Records, Volume 1151, p. 250

1985 per Frank Blair's will, after his death, all 10 acres of his property purchased from Susanna Moehr were deeded to the Travis County Audubon Society, June 10th, 1985, filed August 30th, 1985, County Clerk, Travis County, Texas.

## Historical Significance

While the Audubon property is only 10 of the original 94 acres, a review of the Tobin 1937 aerial photo shows the house and outbuildings, which include the dairy barn, represent the main dairy farm, including the spring. That photo shows there was another building south of the existing out buildings.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, Jun 17, 1924, p.16

<sup>31</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, Jan 28, 1928, p.9

<sup>32</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, May 28, 1930, p.14

<sup>33</sup> *The Austin Statesman*, Jun 1, 1930, p.15

<sup>34</sup> *The Austin American*, Nov 8, 1931, p. 13

<sup>35</sup> *The Austin American*, Oct 22, 1944, p. A13

The Audubon property therefore represents an early 20<sup>th</sup> century dairy farm, owned by Swiss immigrants “right off the boat”, that was part of Fort Prairie. Some artifacts such as cut nails, hand hewn limestone, stacked rock fences, may indicate development from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (or salvaging from Fort Colorado). Fort Prairie may be one of the earliest, and longest continuously inhabited, communities now within Austin’s city limits<sup>36</sup>. In addition, Fort Prairie may well have been in part a heretofore unrecognized freedmen’s community after the Civil War, with former slaves owning property.<sup>37</sup> The Audubon property & structures are a part of that vanishing Fort Prairie community.

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<sup>36</sup> As interviews part of Field’s archeology report points out, “older residents of Fort Prairie had insisted that the town began shortly after the fort was established” which is consistent with other forts in Texas that spawned local communities and towns. And articles in *The Austin Statesman* document Fort Prairie as a community as late as 1939 (*ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Austin American Statesman*) and on maps in 1940. As with many other communities, Fort Prairie would eventually be absorbed into the Austin city limits and slowly lose its separate identify. Never the less, evidence would suggest the area has been continually inhabited since the founding of Fort Colorado.

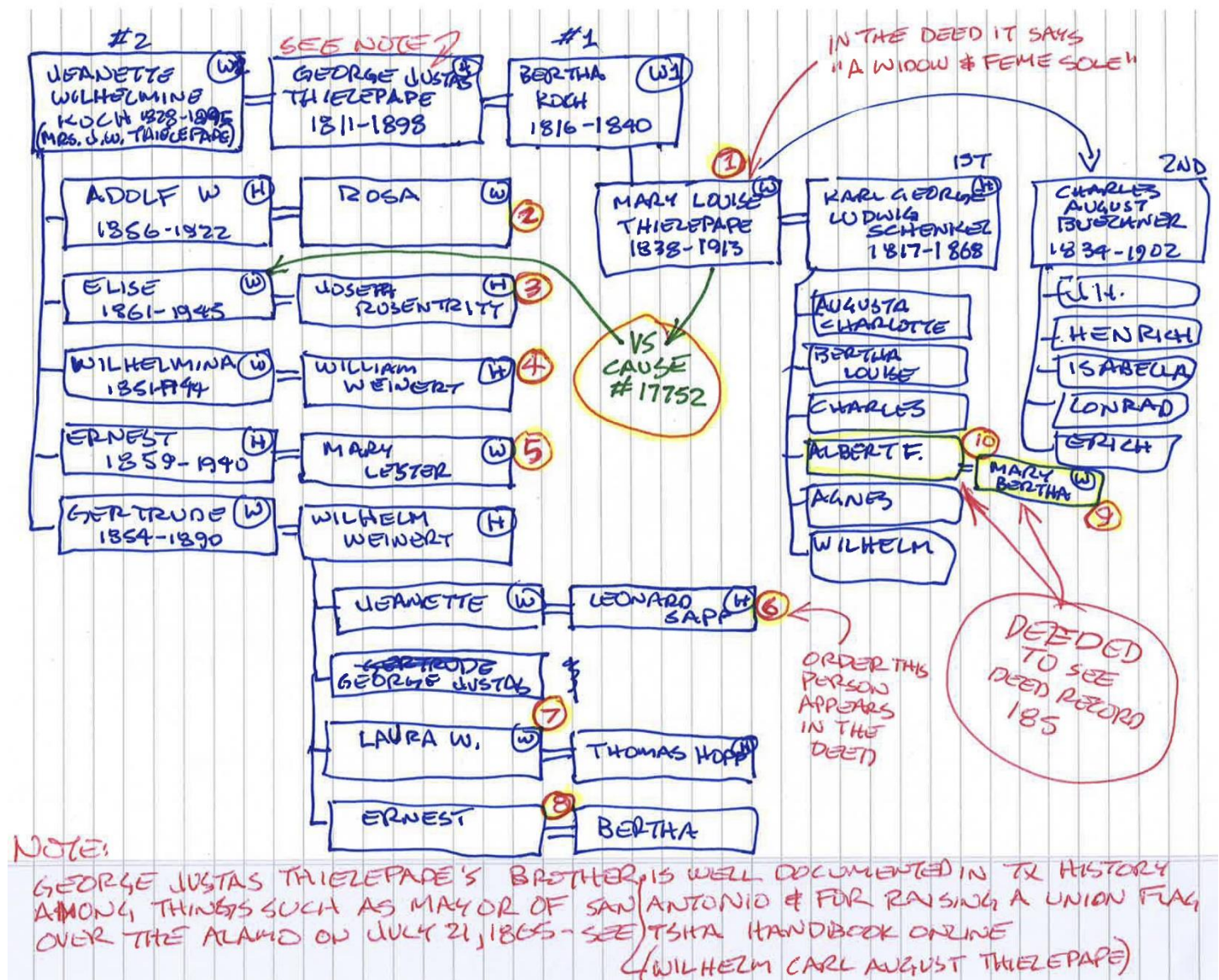
<sup>37</sup> See section below

## Schenken

The informal sketch below illustrates the complexity of persons involved in the 1902 conveyance of the property from the heirs of Mrs. J.W. (Koch) Thielepape to Mary Louise (Thielepape) Schenken. As illustrated here, George Thielepape was married first to Bertha Koch, then after her death to Jeanette Koch. Mary Schenken was the stepdaughter of Jeanette by her father’s first marriage to Bertha Koch. Albert F. Schenken was the son of Mary Schenken. Descendants of George Thielepape from both marriages were involved in the sale.

The provenance of the property, in particular the Moehr period, is well documented in deed and newspaper articles; just like The Antique Road Show, a big part of the value comes from provenance, provenance, provenance! It makes for a great story, might qualify for a historical marker addressing the Moehr farm, Fort Colorado and Fort Prairie, and would be of value as an educational tool for all, and especially those in Austin of Swiss or Swedish descent. A mini Pioneer Farm!<sup>38</sup>

The icing on the cake is the connection with Fort Colorado, arguably Travis County's most historic, important Republic of Texas era Fort; a fort instrumental in the westward move to establish Austin as the Capital of Texas. Coleman Spring is of course thought to have been part of the water supply for the fort, but there is more. As history records the story, when Fort Colorado was decommissioned in 1838, settlers nearby



(Fort Prairie) salvaged dressed logs, lumber, hardware, etc. for their own use. Jessie Tannehill is known to have used materials from the fort in building his house. One obvious question given the very close proximity of the Audubon property to the old fort is whether any of the materials from the fort are existent in the structures on the Audubon property. Because we now know that the Moehrs were the previous owners to the Blairs, we have made an important connection to this story.

In 1965 a “limited” archeological investigation at Fort Colorado was conducted and published in 1968.<sup>39</sup> Paraphrasing from that publication, one important source of information regarding Fort Colorado is Barkley’s *History of Travis County and Austin* in which she recorded an interview with Susannah (sic) Moehr “a long-time resident in the vicinity of the site.” **She recalled that her father had removed some of the logs from the fort in order to build a home.** This is of course Susanna Moehr, daughter of Paul Moehr! As part of the investigation, the archeologist, William Field, conducted interviews with Mrs. Frank Blair. The report then notes “Dr. and Mrs. Frank Blair reside just south of the excavation site and near the present location of the stone monument. Blair, Professor of Zoology at the University of Texas at Austin, and his wife have long had an interest in the history of Fort Colorado, and they gave much valuable assistance throughout the project. Mrs. Blair explained that the logs referred to above [Barkley] were taken from a house apparently built of timbers from the fort and situated just south of Highway 969, not far from the Blair residence. This is almost certainly the cabin shown in a photo given to Barkley by Susanna Moehr and donated to the Austin History Center (Figure 4). Mrs. Blair observed that a spring west of her home, since entirely enclosed in concrete, was pointed out to her by the former owner [that being Susanna Moehr] as being one of the springs used by soldiers from the fort. Another spring, about 150 yards north of the original monument location, was also used.”

Given Austin’s rapid rate of development, the Audubon property may well hold some of the last remaining bits of old Fort Colorado.

## Documentation

This section provides documentation in addition to footnotes.

### Map of Camino Real and FM 969 “Path of the Pioneers”

This map from the El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail Association shows Fort Colorado and Coleman Springs key location on two (pre)historic trails: the Camino Real and the “Path of the Pioneers”.

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<sup>39</sup> Again, this is William Field, “Fort Colorado: A Texas Ranger Frontier Output in Travis County, Texas”, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No.2, 1968



## El Camino Real - Central Travis County



### Legend

- Roads Aligned with Trail
- El Camino Real de los Tejas Trail
- Texas Roads
- Railroad Lines
- Lower Colorado River

El Camino Real de los Tejas  
National Historic Trail

November 25, 2014  
Map by Nathan Garza

## J.P. Richardson

J.P. Richardson may be James Prentice Richardson, served as a Colonel for the Union in the Civil War, Mass. Infantry, 1861-1865. At the close of the war he received a commission in the regular army, which took him to Texas. Being offered the position of judge of the seventeenth judicial district, he resigned his commission in the regular army, and served a term of six years on the bench. In 1877 James P. Richardson,

attorney, was residing at NW corner of Walnut and Congress Ave. In 1880 census listed as a lawyer, boarding on Walnut Street (14th) in Austin, TX. In 1890 was living in Austin, TX, Enumeration District 147. Died in Austin, 1901, age 79, remains were sent back to Mass. for burial.

See *Mooney & Morrison's General Directory Of The City Of Austin, Texas, For 1877-78*, p.194 <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph46838/>. See 1880 United States Federal Census <https://www.ancestry.com/sharing/12327173?h=e92211>. See 1890 Veterans Schedules <https://www.ancestry.com/sharing/12323146?h=84baac>. See Find A Grave <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/132635542/james-prentice-richardson>. See *Austin Daily Statesman*(1901) <https://www.austinlibrary.com:8443/login?url=https://www.austinlibrary.com:2129/docview/1612849595?accountid=7451>.

## Thielepape

J.W. Thielepape is Jeanette Wilhelmine (Koch) Thielepape. BIRTH APR 1828, Cassel, Ahrweiler, Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany. DEATH DEC 1895, Austin, Travis, Texas, United States. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/59738248/schanette-wilhelmina-thielepape>

Was married to George (AKA Georg) Justus Thielepape. BIRTH 11 JAN 1811, Wabern, Hessen, Kassel, Germany. DEATH 04 DEC 1898, Austin, Travis, Texas, United States. 1880 census says he was a Draftsman in Gen. Land Office <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/59738174/george-justus-thielepape>.

After the death of his first wife, Bertha Koch, George came to the US, first visiting other states then eventually to Texas through, Indianola, Texas. In 1845 he went to New Braunfels, joining Prince Solm in New Braunfels, the first Texas colony of German immigrants. Circa 1848 he went back to Germany to “settle affairs” and married Jeanette W. Koch in 1850, Bertha’s sister.<sup>40</sup> They then returned to Texas. Bertha & Jeanette Koch are per AHC family history aunts of Heinrich Hermann Robert Koch (1843-1910), who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology / Medicine in 1905. The Kochs may have been a family of wealth accounting for Jeanette being the one that purchased the 94-acre property on which the Audubon property sits.

George’s brother was Wilhelm Carl August Thielepape (1814–1904) who served as mayor of San Antonio during Reconstruction, from 1867 through 1872. Retrieved 1/8/2018 from <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fth41>

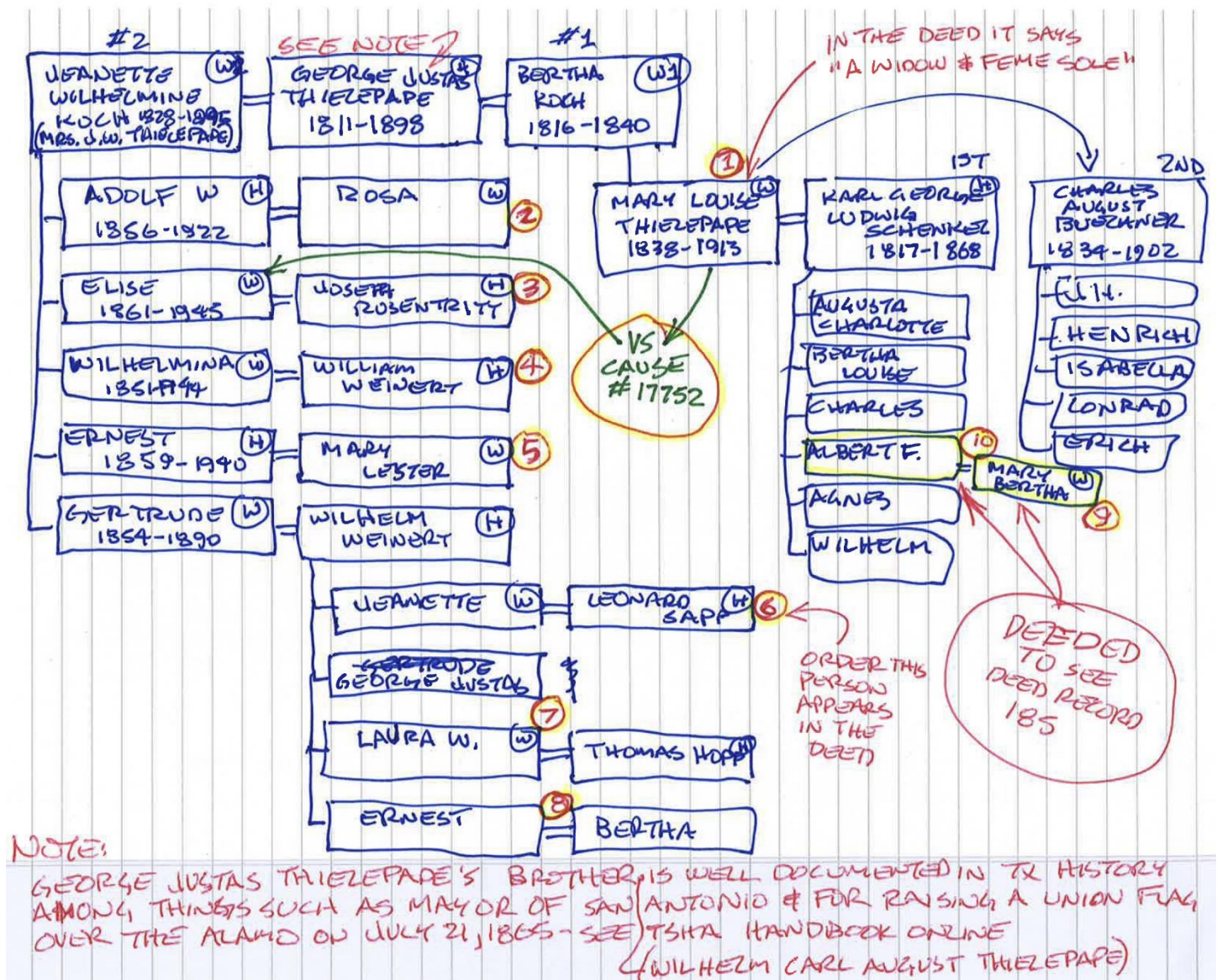
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<sup>40</sup> Ancestry.com. Descendants of Conrad Carl Friedrich Koch. Public tree of Halie Thielepape. Retrieved 1/23/19 from <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/107851845/person/130068279837/facts>



## Schenken

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# Fort Prairie: A Freedmen's Community?

This section looks at evidence that Fort Prairie was a freedmen's community in Travis County that has heretofore been unrecognized as such. There are abundant reports of the black community that lived at Fort Prairie both in the newspapers of the day, and in the deed trail. For news articles *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Austin American Statesman*, Newspapers.com and Portal to Texas History are great sources for news articles on Fort Prairie in general.

1871. One of the first references to Fort Prairie in the news is about a black church: "The colored Methodist Church commenced holding a camp meeting on Thursday last, at Fort Prairie, and expect to continue it for three weeks ... there is a large attendance, and much interest is manifested."<sup>41</sup>

1887. Newspaper: "Travis County School Teachers ... Third Grade, Colored ... Estha A. Akes, Fort Prairie..."<sup>42</sup>

1888. Newspaper: "County Schools. Names of School Trustees of Travis County. Number of the Districts, Names of Schools and Number of Pupils ... District 212. Fort Prairie, colored, 82 [pupils]"<sup>43</sup>

1939. This article points to the fact that ex-slaves owned property (as do deeds) in Fort Prairie: "Ex-Slave, 95, Comes Here Every Year to Pay Taxes", *The Austin Statesman*, Feb 17, 1939.

Another article in 1910 describes "the colored institute": "Promptly at 9 o'clock yesterday morning President J. F. Dawkins called the colored institute to order ... The Fort Prairie school is doing real and practical work in agriculture. They have been raising for the last few years an excellent variety of vegetables and the children have raised enough to supply the home. W.M. Lee's school at Fort Prairie is the model colored school of Travis county. He is not talking things, but is doing things." CAMPAIGN FOR MORALITY: COLORED TEACHER WILL INCULCATE VIRTUE..., *The Austin Statesman*, Oct 28, 1910.

Travis County Deed Records point to an area of about 150+ acres that appears to have been a freedmen's community in Fort Prairie just south of the Audubon property, bordering the Thielepape property on the 1891 Map of Austin and Surrounding Properties; see Figure 1. One person referenced in the deed transfers was "Ples." (Pleasant) Davidson. Through Ancestry.com a descendant, Mr. Jared Gray, was found who told us

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<sup>41</sup> Weekly Democratic Statesman. (Austin, Tex.), Vol. 1, No. 1, Ed. 1 Tuesday, August 1, 1871

<http://bit.ly/2RFK3Tk>

<sup>42</sup> Austin Daily Statesman, 06 Nov 1887, p5, retrieved from Newspapers.com

<sup>43</sup> Austin Weekly Statesman. (Austin, Tex.), Vol. 17, No. 35, Ed. 1, p6, Thursday, July 26, 1888. Portal to Texas History.

<http://bit.ly/2BKgPJB>

Davidson's spouse, Jane Doyle, was a member of St. Mary's Colony in Bastrop<sup>44</sup>; the family still owns land passed down from slave ancestors; a very interesting historical connection to Fort Prairie.

This Fort Prairie community (*approximate* outline Figure 1) begins with an initial sale in 1869 of 158 acres by William J. Tannehill (heir of Jessie C. Tannehill) and wife to a Mr. Peter Bell. That property is then subdivided via composition deed among Peter Bell and others, Pleasant Davidson being one. The 1870 census of Travis County confirms these were deed transfers to black members of the community. See December 23, 1869 William J. Tannehill to Peter Bell et.al (Travis County Deed Records, Deed Record Z, p.293), and William Bell to Composition deed, Ples. (Pleasant) Davidson and others (Deed Record Z, p.295).

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph787627/m1/303/?q=Travis%20County%20Deed%20Records:%20Deed%20Record%20Z>

21-October-1874 Peter Bell & Wife to Simon Butler, Deed Record 27, p.489; this deed transfer mentions Lot #7 (see Figure 1) "known as the colored folks campground" in Fort Prairie, along Fort Branch (creek).

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph787615/m1/495/?q=Travis%20County%20Deed%20Records:%20Deed%20Record%2027>

10-April-1880 Peter Bell & Wife to Clara McKinney, Deed Record 50, p.138; makes reference to a "158 acre tract subdivided and sold to colored citizens, at a place called Fort Prairie". This is a reference back to the area highlighted in Figure 1 from the initial sale of 1869

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph787637/m1/144/?q=Travis%20County%20Deed%20Records:%20Deed%20Record%2050>

27-December-1883 Peter Bell to Harriet Goodin 58-408 "land is in the Fort Prairie Settlement near Peterville Church House"; this deed transfer references "tract No. 5" (see Figure 1)

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph787631/m1/414/?q=Travis%20County%20Deed%20Records:%20Deed%20Record%2058>

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<sup>44</sup> St. Mary's Colony, Handbook of Texas, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hrs77>



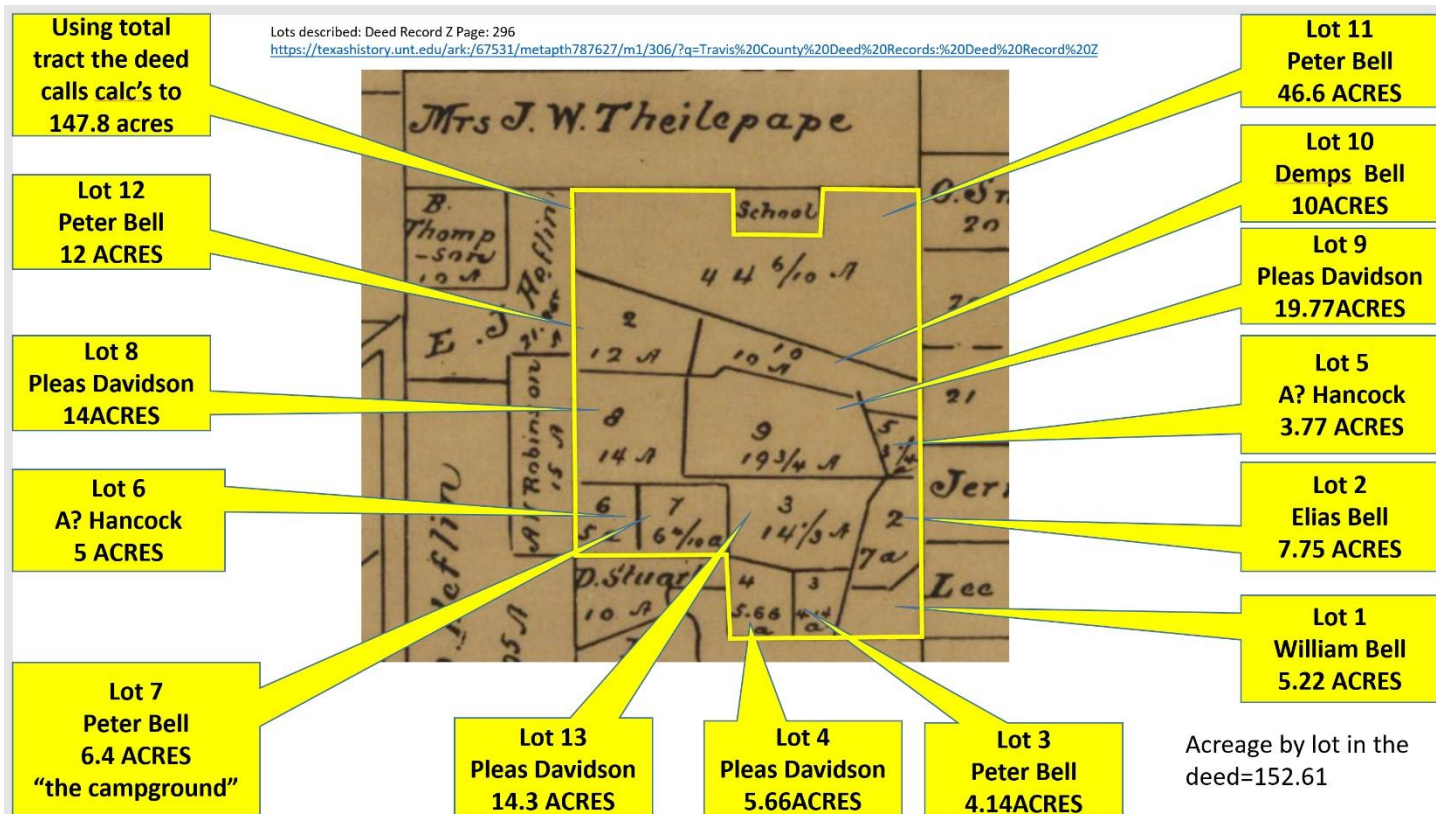


Figure 1 Approximate outline of probable freedmen's community in Fort Prairie using 1891 Map of Austin and Surrounding Properties. The Audubon property lies north of the school lot inside the Theilepape tract. Notice also the School tract; this may have actually been part of Peter Bell's property which he later deeded as a black church / school (Peterville Church).

## Old Photos & Maps Related to Property

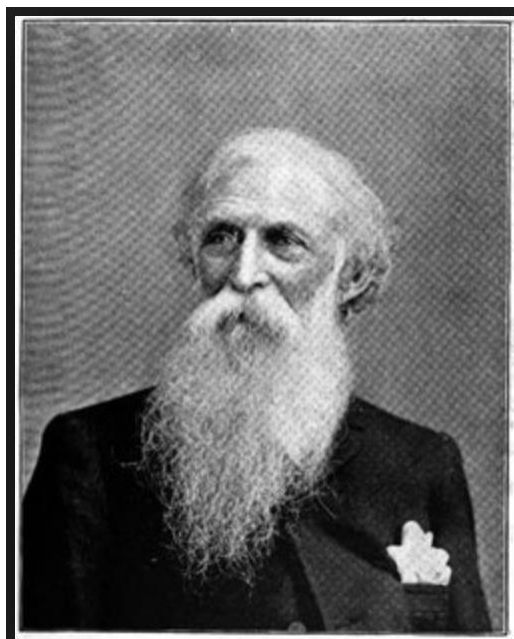


Figure 2 James Prentice Richardson from Ancestry.com



Figure 3 Jeanette Wilhelmine (Koch) Thielepape and husband Georg Justus Thielepape. Jeanette purchased the 94 acre property in 1884. From Ancestry.com.

The photo in Figure 4 appears in Barkley's *A History of Central Texas* (p.99). The caption reads "Picture of building that was part of Fort Coleman." A copy of this photo, donated by Barkley, is on file at the Austin History Center<sup>45</sup>. Also on file is the envelope Barkley used in making a copy of the photo (Figure 5) explaining: "This picture given me in June, 1965, when I was instrumental in getting marker moved to Webberville Road<sup>46</sup>, of monument to Fort Coleman. From Susie Moehr, and shows one of original log cabins built by fort, originally on their land, where marker is now." This is almost certainly the cabin Susanna Moehr says her father, Paul Moehr, salvaged for a building or buildings on the Moehr farm.

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<sup>45</sup> Photo is in Box 7 folder 3; photo envelope is stored separately in Box 5 Folder 25

<sup>46</sup> The original 1936 FORT COLORADO marker was "lost" for a while in a pasture near where the old fort was thought to be. Barkley relocated the marker and was involved in having it moved to its current location on Martin Luther King Blvd. See "Her 'History' Nears Second Edition", *The Austin American*, p. A18, Sep 4, 1966. See "Restoration Plan Going Ahead Here", *The Austin American*, p. A22, Sep 11, 1966. See Field's archeology report.



Picture of building that was part of old Fort Coleman.

Figure 4 photo from Barkley's A History of Central Texas. This copy from Richard Denney's collection

Fort Coleman - original  
Log Cabin

NAME Mrs. Ted Barkley STORE NO. \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

CHECK FILM ☒ DEVELOP AND PRINT ORDERS FILM SIZE \_\_\_\_\_ NO. OF ROLLS \_\_\_\_\_ NO. OF PRINTS FROM EACH NEG. \_\_\_\_\_

KODACHROME KODACHROME REPRINT ORDERS NO. OF NEGATIVES OR SLIDES \_\_\_\_\_ NO. OF PRINTS FROM EACH SLIDE OR NEG. \_\_\_\_\_ ENLARGEMENT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

COLOR PRINT FROM SLIDE \_\_\_\_\_

INSTRUCTIONS: This picture given me in June 1965, when I was instrumental in getting marker moved to Webberville Road, of monument to Fort Coleman. From State Moehr, and shows one of original log cabins built by fort, originally on their land, where marker is now. See my book, HISTORY OF TRAVIS COUNTY AND AUSTIN.

PRINTS MADE \_\_\_\_\_ PRICE \_\_\_\_\_

ELLISON PHOTO CO.  
615 Congress  
AUSTIN, TEXAS  
Oldest Kodak Dealer in Texas

Figure 5 Envelope describing origin of photo in Figure 4. Photo appears in Barkley's History of Central Texas, not History of Travis County and Austin. Photo courtesy Lanny Ottosen.



*Figure 6 Susanna Moehr - Family Picnic, June 22, 1947<sup>47</sup>.*

The photo in Figure 6 is from 1947 after Susanna Moehr obtained deed from her siblings; both parents were deceased at this time. This is prior to Frank Blair having purchased 10 acres of the property, now the Audubon property.

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<sup>47</sup>[texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth34176/m1/1/?utm\\_source=email&utm\\_medium=client&utm\\_content=ark\\_sidebar&utm\\_campaign=ark\\_permaent](https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth34176/m1/1/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=client&utm_content=ark_sidebar&utm_campaign=ark_permaent): accessed January 7, 2018, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, [texashistory.unt.edu](https://texashistory.unt.edu); crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.



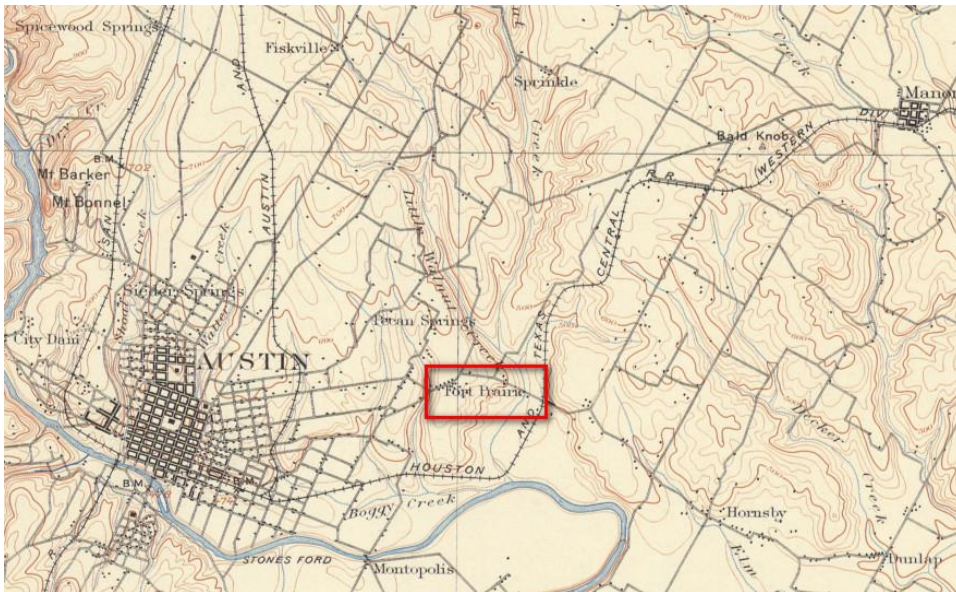


Figure 7 Fort Prairie on 1896 USGS top of Austin and Travis Count showing Fort Prairie along Webberville Road.

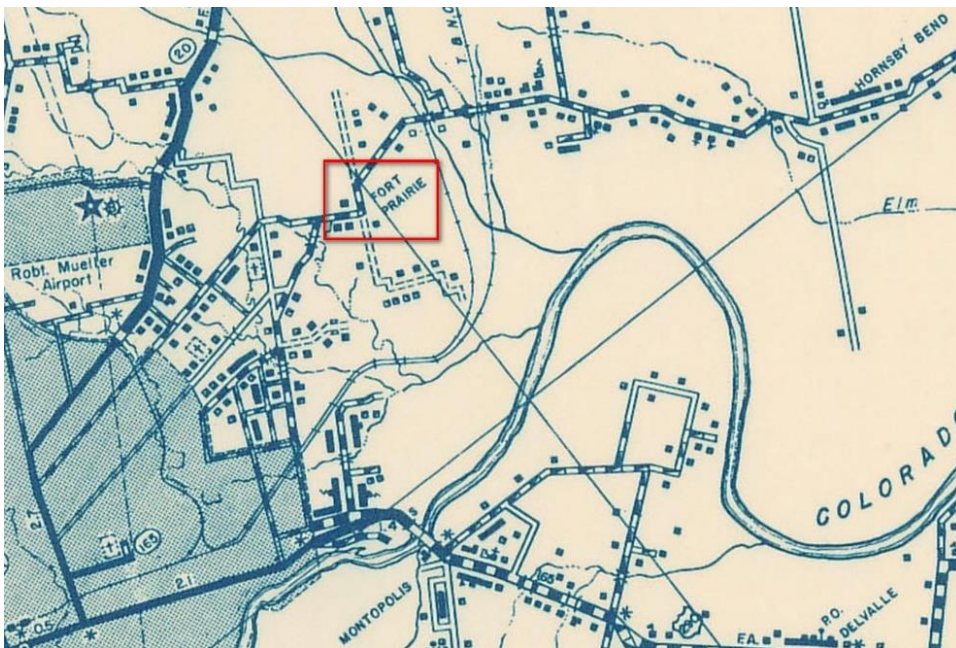


Figure 8 Fort Prairie still on maps in 1940 illustrated here in a 1940 General Highway Map of Travis Co. Texas State Archives Map Number 05008





Figure 9 1937 Tobin aerial photo with property lines from 1891 Map of Austin and Surrounding Properties<sup>48</sup> superimposed. Arrow points to the 94 acre J.W. Theilepape property, later purchased by Paul Moehr. The Audubon property is a subsection of this larger farm.

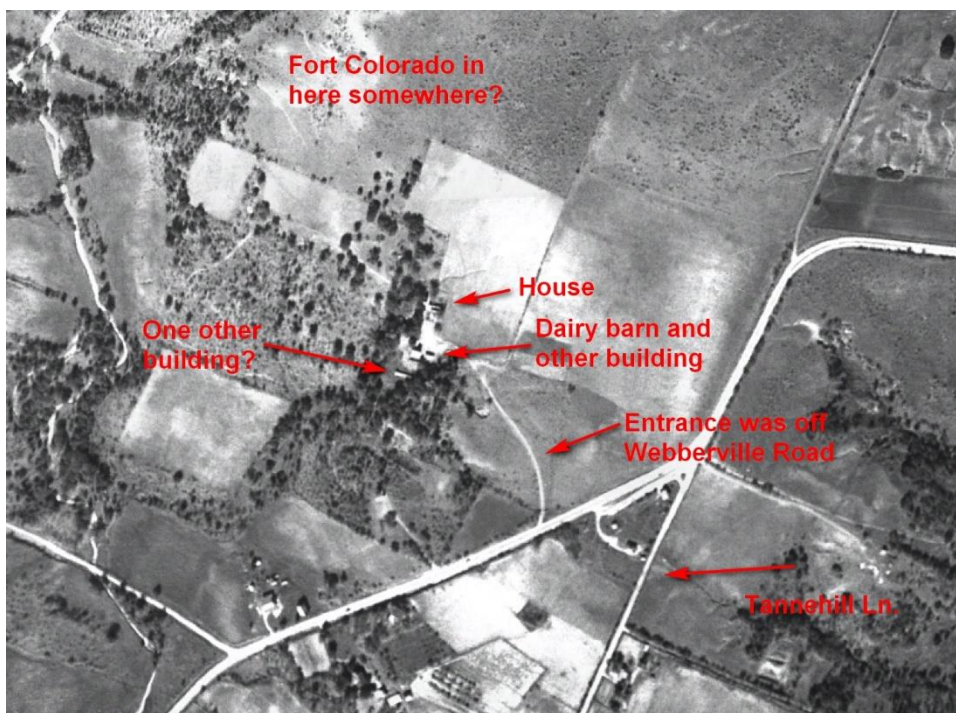


Figure 10 1937 Tobin aerial of the Moehr dairy farm.

Figure 9 and Figure 10 are from the 1937 aerial of the Moehr farm acquired from Tobin Imagery. 1937 is after both Paul Moehr, Sr. and wife have passed, and before Susanna Moehr acquires deed from her siblings. This early aerial of the farm is useful to establish several facts:

- First, the farm entrance was from Webberville Road; this was before 969 was extended as MLK Blvd is today. It kind of turns the property upside down in terms of our thinking today! This may very well

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.glo.texas.gov>

have been the same access route to Fort Colorado: a road off Webberville Road (Barkley's Path of the Pioneers, the early entrance to Waterloo / Austin) running northwest to Coleman Springs, then on to the fort.

- The buildings today on the Audubon property were part of THE farm; i.e. the farm wasn't somewhere else, and the Audubon property has some outbuildings for "guest quarters". The structures on the Audubon property are the Moehr farm.
- There was another building on the farm south of the existing buildings; it would be worthwhile taking a hike down there to see if anything there is left.
- Buildings located on a neighbor's property next door are nowhere to be seen in 1937 so do not appear to have been part of the farm.

An article from the Georgetown Williamson County Sun ran in 1951 says<sup>49</sup>: "Mrs. Susanna Moehr, whose farm is located on the Webberville road ... recently finished one and a half miles of channel type terraces. These terraces empty onto pasture land furnishing vegetative protection from erosion. This is one of many conservation practices Mrs. Moehr plans to establish on her farm." These terraces are clearly visible in aerial photos from 1954 on HistoricalAerials.com (see Figure 11). While not obvious from the photo, there is a slope from a high point at the intersection of the newly (at that time) extended 969 & Webberville Rd., down to the farm. This photo gives us good indication of what part of the farm was being used as pasture.



Figure 11 Channel type terraces put in place by Susanna Moehr

<sup>49</sup> Georgetown Williamson County Sun, Georgetown, Texas. Thu, Mar 29, 1951, P.17



*Figure 12 Aerial photo acquired from Historic Aerials of the farm in 1952. Original entrance from south off Webberville Rd. still visible, as well today's entrance from north off FM 969.*

## Stained Glass Windows

There are several stained-glass windows in the Blair house. James Zollo of Zollo Studio specializes in custom stained glass and has reviewed photos of the windows and made a visit to the Blair house for an up-close inspection 3/09/19.

In the dining room is a ca. 1910 Victorian window, mounted from the outside, containing early Kokomo<sup>50</sup> ripple glass, an English glass border and Cathedral glass elsewhere. Window is in good shape. In the X-Ray room, on the north wall is another ca. 1910 window with Kokomo glass.

Also, in the X-Ray room on the east wall is a window ca. 1960; James speculates it may have been done by Renaissance Glass Company that was in Austin at the time, now closed.

In the dairy barn there are four clear glass leaded windows with diamond patterns. These are now placed horizontal but were originally meant as vertical "sidelights". They are from the early 1900's. The diamond shapes were mill-worked and were expensive. James mentioned "repose" glass (?).

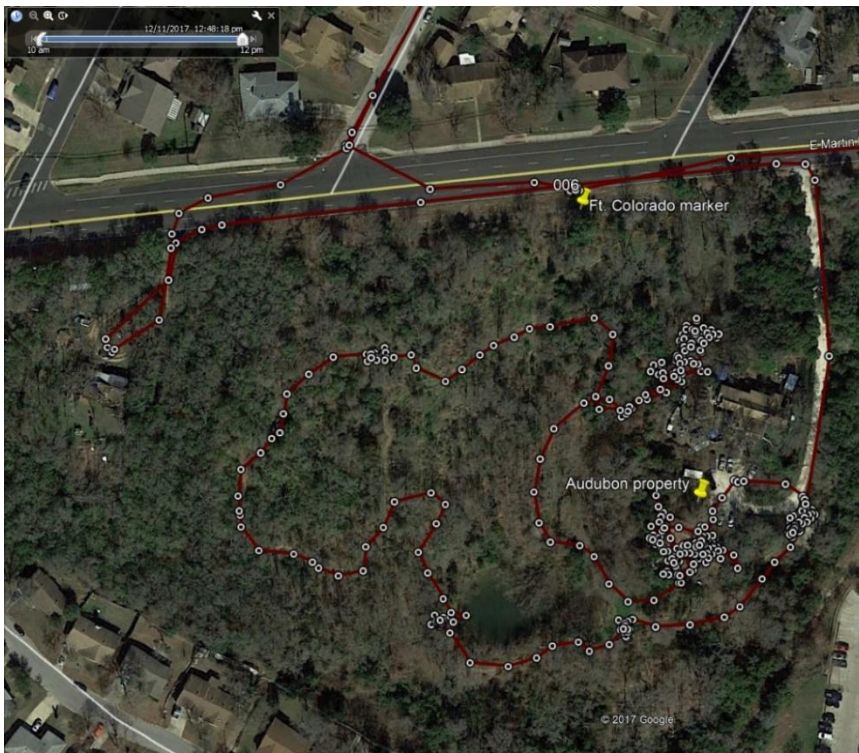
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<sup>50</sup> Kokomo Opalescent Glass Co., Kokomo, Indiana, was started in the late 19th century and is still in business. See their history page for more details <https://www.kog.com/in-depth-history.html>



## Photos from Field Trips

This section has various photos from multiple field trips; they are not organized in any particular order.



*Figure 13 GPS track of our trip in terms of 2017 Google Earth*



Figure 14 GPS track of our trip in terms of 1937 Tobin aerial photo; notice we stood at east end of the building that is no longer there



Figure 15 TCHC members along with Audubon members and Travis County staff touring the property. The building in this photo is the old dairy with concrete gutter for waste disposal.





Figure 16 Moehr dairy barn. Advertisement in 1930 said the farm had "concrete milk house". Notice concrete floor with gutter running length of building to open door at far end. Figure 17 illustrates purpose of gutter.

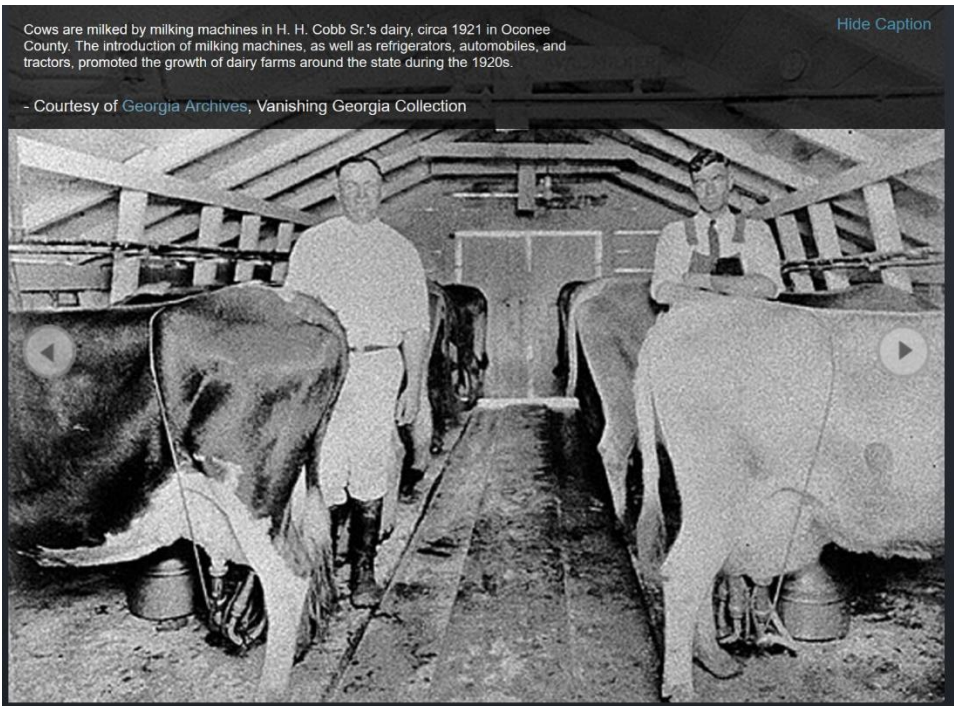


Figure 17 Photo from internet ca. 1921 of a dairy barn. Notice gutter running length of dairy barn. Cows are parked back end to the gutter; "poop" and "pee" are deposited in gutter then shoveled to doors at end of barn. Same setup was seen in the Moehr dairy barn.



*Figure 18 South side of dairy barn. In bad shape, but also where we found many cut nails. Cut nails have tapered rectangular shafts and rectangular heads and were in use in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*





*Figure 19 Just some of the cut nails, and cut nail holes, found in planks and posts of dairy barn*



*Figure 20 More cut nails in a post which also appeared to have been hand notched for a cross beam of some kind.*





*Figure 21 Drilled grooves in plank of dairy barn; thought to be technique for splitting planks*



*Figure 22 Out building across (east) from dairy barn. Notice limestone steps at door.*





*Figure 23 Closeup of limestone steps. There are three.*

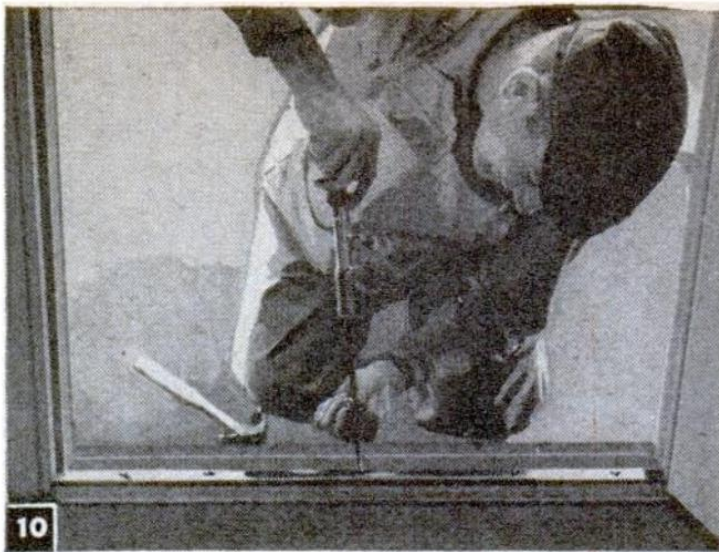


*Figure 24 We turned two of the three steps over revealing they were hand hewn limestone*





Figure 25 Door's threshold was covered in tin or copper metal. A bit of research provides possible explanation: such thresholds can be added to facilitate ease of closing and opening the door as shown in an old magazine found on the internet (see Figure 26)



Above, on old door frames a metal threshold is carefully installed so that door will close without binding. Left, when installing metal stripping, space back of striker plate is closed with spring bronze

Figure 26 Metal thresholds installed in old door frames so that door will close without binding.



*Figure 27 Chain found inside the building. Some research required to discover its purpose; it is variously called a “trace chain”, “neck yoke chain”, or “breast chain”. It is part of a harness used with horses or other draft animals.*





Figure 28 An ad from e-bay advertising "Antique Civil War Era Kentucky Horse Trace Chain"

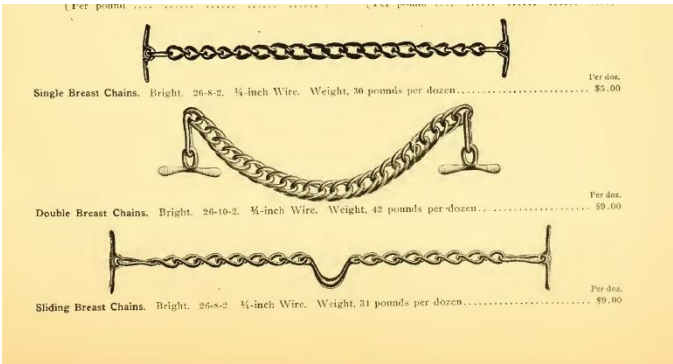


Figure 29 Advertisement for "breast chains" of various types, J. M. Eilers & Co, Catalogue no. 2 – 1907. Courtesy Lanny Ottosen.



Figure 30 Modern photo of a such a chain used with a yoke. Photo courtesy Johnny Kee of Beebe, Arkansas, and Lanny Ottosen.

**NASHVILLE**  
TRADE MARK  
**SADDLERY CO.**

Harness will be sent according to description, unless otherwise ordered. Give size of Collars wanted when ordering.

**No. 88. CHAIN TRACE WAGON HARNESS.**

<b>BRIDLES</b> —1½-inch, No. 1 pigeon wing stage.	<b>TRACES</b> —7-10-2 chains, covered with 36-inch leather pipes.
<b>LINES</b> —1-inch x 14 feet, with snaps.	<b>BACK BANDS</b> —Folded with 1½-inch lays.
<b>COLLARS</b> —No. 44 Scotch.	<b>BELLY BANDS</b> —1½-inch, flat.
<b>HAMES</b> —Red, bronze top city dray.	<b>BREECHING</b> —Heavy, folded with lay, 1-inch double hip straps, 1½-inch back straps.
<b>BREAST CHAINS</b> —28-inch, double twist link, ¾-inch harness leather hame strings.	

Price per set.....\$22 50

Figure 31 Advertisement from Nashville Saddlery Company - 1889. Includes breast chains and trace chains. Courtesy Lanny Ottosen.

Gunnar Brune<sup>51</sup> describes Coleman Springs: "The strong springs issue from Quaternary gravel, feeding Fort Branch. They were used as a control point in early surveys. A deep hole which existed at the springs has been filled with sediment in recent years, according to Mrs. Blair ... A domestic well now pumps at the site." See Figure 32.

<sup>51</sup> Springs of Texas, p.435





*Figure 32 Spring house built to pump water from Coleman Springs.*

Uphill from the spring house is what appears concrete of some sort, although some geo types had suggested it might be natural? Relating to what may be concrete in the spring area, a comment was made by Fields (p.187) in his report that Coleman Spring had been "entirely enclosed in concrete". Why this would have been done is unknown, though Lanny says he has seen this elsewhere as a way to increase water pressure or otherwise divert flow. There is the comment made by Brune quoting Mrs. Blair that a "deep hole" had once existed at the spring. Was it purposefully filled?



*Figure 33 Concrete, natural deposit, or a little of both? A bit of a concrete culvert is visible in the lower left of photo.*





*Figure 34 The arroyo where the spring is located may have served as a dump. Among the debris, lumber with possible cut nails*



*Figure 35 Concrete block with iron bolt of unknown function in spring arroyo*



*Figure 36 More debris apparently discarded into the arroyo. Irregular shape brick indicating handmade?*

A dry stacked wall runs the length of the spring arroyo to the west of the house. Dry stacked stone walls were constructed in the days before barbed wire as a way to keep cattle and other livestock out of crops, or in this case, perhaps safe from falling into the spring arroyo. These walls are common throughout the Texas Hill Country, especially associated with German settlers. A famous demonstration on Alamo Plaza in San Antonio was conducted in 1876 in which barbed wire was used to restrain a herd of longhorn cattle; it was not until after that time that its use in Texas became widespread. A possible clue the wall may date to the 19th century.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Cox, Mike. Rock Fences (2008). Retrieved 1/10/2018 from <http://www.texasescapes.com/MikeCoxTexasTales/Rock-Fences.htm>





*Figure 37 Dry stacked wall along spring arroyo.*

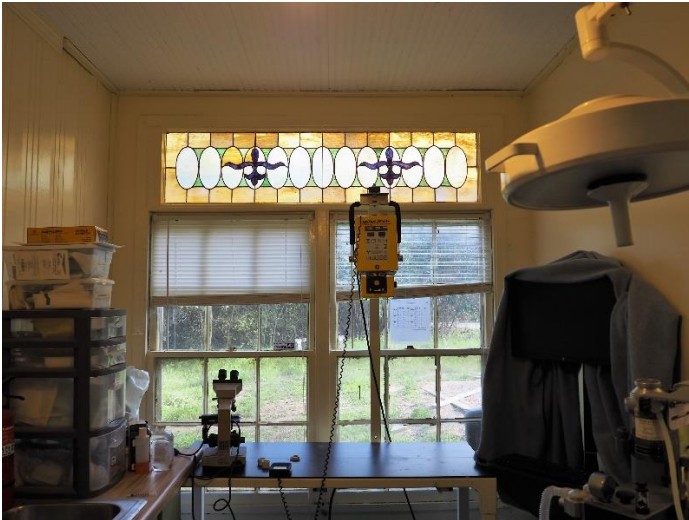


*Figure 38 Among various bricks on property as these, marked "PRM & M CO."*

Among bricks found on the property are these, marked "PRM & M CO." Stands for PARKER-RUSSELL MINING AND MANUFACTURING CO. Parker-Russell was part of a growing brick industry in St. Louis, Missouri during the mid to late 19th century. The company was particularly known for making handmade firebrick, furnace blocks and other fire resistant building materials. In addition to shape and color, PRM & M CO bricks are noted for having three stars, "XXX" or "No. 1" below the company name.



*Figure 39 Sweet-Orr button found near dairy barn. A company "dating back more than 144 years ... and may actually have been the first commercial jeans producer". The company grew in notoriety to such an extent its garments -- and buttons such as this -- are still prized collectables today.*



*Figure 40 Kokomo stained glass in x-ray room*





Figure 41 Another of the Kokomo stained glass windows

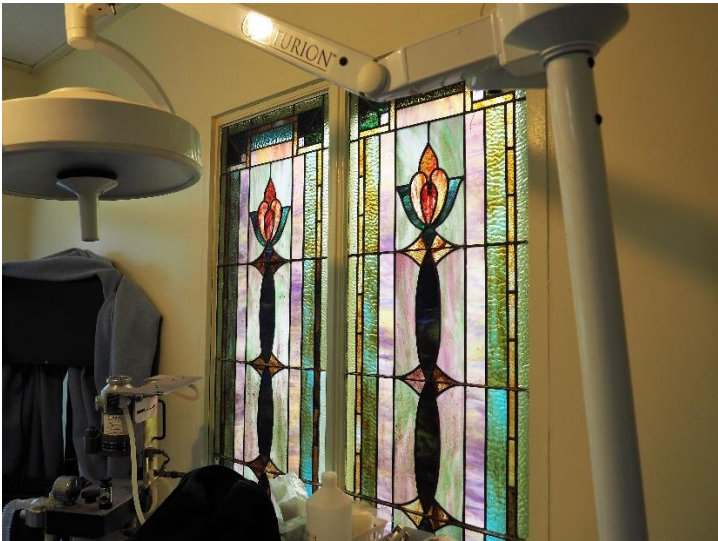


Figure 42 The more modern stained-glass window ca. 1960s (?)





Figure 43 Franklin Stove likely installed by Blairs. One website says "Back in the 1970's Montgomery Wards sold a ton of these stoves"<sup>53</sup>



Figure 44 MFD. FOR MONTBOMERY WARD, FRANKLIN STOVE, MADE IN TAIWAN, MODEL NO. YMT 74-21015, SERIAL NO. 791

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.firewood-for-life.com/franklin-wood-stove.html>